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Friday, 7 February, 2003, 13:35 GMT

Ghanaian doctor fined for funeral trick



By Kwaku Sakyi-Addo

BBC, Accra

About three years ago, a Ghanaian doctor in the south-east of the country came to public notice when he tricked a family into believing their relative had died, in order to get them to pay the hospital bill.

The doctor has now been sanctioned by the Ghana Medical Association for unethical conduct.

The state-owned Ghanaian Times reported that Dr Adolph Takyi, who runs the Akpe na Mawu, or Thanks Be to God Clinic at Ho, in the Volta Region, has paid a fine of \$120.

Three years ago, Dr Takyi was having a difficult time getting a patient, Cujoe Gokah and his family, to pay his hospital bill of nearly \$60.

But the family showed up with the money, when the doctor sent a message that Gokah had died.

Alive again

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Whilst waiting to be shown the corpse, Gokah emerged alive, leaving the family pleased but confused, until the doctor explained what he had done.

Still, the incident attracted crowds who wanted to see the man who had been resurrected.

Dr Takyi allegedly charged curiosity seekers to get a glimpse of Gokah.

Despite Dr Takyi's sanction, the incident does raise questions about Ghanaian attitudes, where families insist they cannot afford the cost of medical care, but will willingly spend huge sums of money on funerals.

Party on

These days, it has become increasingly difficult to tell the difference between a wedding party and a funeral.

There's a lot to eat and drink; families order special textiles or T-shirts with the image of the deceased embossed on it.

There is live big band music, and mourners, if you can still call them that, dance and romp and make merry all day and night.

The practice has led some churches and traditional leaders to place limitations on funeral expenditure in parts of the country.

It has also led people to conclude that in Ghana if you see mourners actually crying, it is not only because a relative they love has died, but because of what it costs to bury them.

The cost of living may be high, but the cost of dying is even worse.

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